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ABSTRACT

The 39-month Rural Teacher Education Improvement Project at Western Montana College addressed the critical problem of teacher shortage in Montana, a predominately rural state. The goal was to develop and demonstrate a curriculum that would prepare teachers for rural/small schools. The following components of the training model have been institutionalized: (1) the development of a new curriculum to train teachers for rural/small schools; (2) establishment of laboratory sites throughout Montana for field experience in rural/small schools; and (3) the establishment of a sophomore exploratory field experience and a junior professional block field experience. Significant findings show that teachers and administrators at field experience sites are more supportive and effective when they have participated with college instructors in identifying the tasks students are expected to complete at the field sites. Three field and block experience task manuals, "Exploratory Field Experience Task Manual," "Professional Field Experience Secondary Student Manual," and "Professional Field Experience Elementary Student Manual," have been developed. (LL)

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Cover Sheet

Grantee Organization: Western Montana College
710 S Atlantic
Dillon MT 59725

Grant Number: G008642151

Project Dates: Starting Date: October 1, 1986
Ending Date: December 31, 1989
Number of months: 39

Project Director: Lee Spuhler
Rural Education Western Montana College
710 S Atlantic
Telephone: (406)683-7121

FIPSE Program Officer: David Holmes

Grant Award: Year 1 $64,300
Year 2 $33,583
Year 3 $26,900

Total $124,783

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B. Summaries

1. Paragraph Summary: The Rural Teacher Education Improvement Project's goal was to develop and demonstrate a curriculum that prepares teachers for rural/small schools. The following components of the training model have been institutionalized:

   a. The development of a new curriculum to train teachers for rural/small schools.
   b. The establishment of laboratory sites throughout the state for field experience in rural/small schools.
   c. The establishment of a sophomore exploratory field experience and a junior professional block field experience including the development of three field task manuals.

A follow-up of the new teachers will be reported nationally and include teacher performance, retention and job satisfaction in rural/small schools.

Lee Spuhler, Director
Western Montana College
710 S Atlantic
Dillon MT 59725
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Title of Project Products

Exploratory Field Experience Task Manual
Professional Field Experience Secondary Student Manual
Professional Field Experience Elementary Student Manual

2. Executive Summary:

Project Title: Rural Teacher Education Improvement Project

Grantee: Western Montana College
710 S Atlantic
Dillon MT 59725

Director: Lee Spuhler
(406)683-7121

a. Project Overview: The rural Teacher Education Improvement Project's goal was to develop and demonstrate a curriculum that prepares teachers for rural/small schools. The following components of the training model have been institutionalized:

1. The development of a new curriculum to train teachers for rural/small schools.
2. The establishment of laboratory sites throughout the state for field experience in rural/small schools.
3. The establishment of a sophomore exploratory field experience and a junior professional block field experience including the development of three field task manuals.

A follow-up of the new teachers will be reported nationally and include teacher performance, retention and job satisfaction in rural/small schools.

b. Purpose: Montana and 28 other predominately rural states have growing problems of teacher turnover and are unable to attract and retain highly able teachers. Seventy-five percent of the nation's schools districts and 35% of the population now reside in rural areas and there is a need for specialized teacher training to meet unique small school district needs. The problem to which this project is addressed is threefold: the critical teacher shortages in rural areas across the U.S.; the lack of university support for rural teacher education programs; and, the lack of innovative pre-service models for teacher training which specifically address the needs of rural/small schools.

c. Background & Origins: Montana, geographically the nation's fourth largest state, is 570 miles long (east-west) and 340 miles wide. To put the Montana vastness in perspective, the northwest corner of Montana to the southeast corner is close to 700 miles--farther than Chicago to Washington D.C. Its 147,138 square miles of land can be divided into three main topographical areas: the western one-third is mountainous with fertile valleys; the central is characterized by elevated plans and eroded valleys with long, cold winters and short, hot summers; and the eastern third is a plains area best known for its farming and ranching.

Despite its size, Montana is forty-fourth in population with a distribution density of 5.4 persons per square mile. This fact exerts an enormous influence on the communities and people of the

state. No Montana community exceeds 100,000 population, and many are in the three digit category. Forty-seven percent of the state's population reside in rural areas or in communities with populations under 2,500. For this project, the definition of rural/small schools is one/three teacher elementary schools and small combination high school/elementary schools with high school enrollments under 100 and elementary teacher teaching multigrade.

There are 188 one-four teacher rural elementary schools in Montana with student enrollments ranging from 2-65. Of the 188 one-four teacher schools, 104 are one teacher schools. There are 92 small high schools with student enrollments ranging from 14-114. All of these small/rural high schools have adjoining elementary schools where a majority of the classes are taught multigrade.

Western Montana College of The University of Montana with an enrollment of approximately 1000 students has been involved in the education of teachers since its inception as a Normal College in 1893. Designated in 1980 as the Montana Rural Education Center by University System Board of Regents, the central focus of the institution continues to be providing services to rural students, teachers, school districts and communities. For the past ten years, Western Montana College, in cooperation with the Montana County Superintendents of School Association, has hosted the annual Montana Rural Education conference for teachers and administrators from rural/small school.

d. Project Description: The following three models developed through the program have been institutionalized: 1) the new curriculum to train teachers for rural/small schools; 2) the establishment of laboratory sites throughout the state for field experiences in rural/small schools; and, 3) the establishment of a sophomore exploratory field experience and a junior professional block field experience.

In the first year of the program ten sites were established for the sophomore exploratory field experience. A site is a county and comprises the rural/small schools in that county. The counties were chosen that geographically represent most areas of the state and extend from Dawson in the east to Lake/Flathead in the west. A field manual of tasks is completed by students during the one week sophomore exploratory field experience and many students stay with host families. The manual was developed by elementary and secondary teachers and college instructors. Also, during the first year the new teacher education curriculum was developed and includes expanded liberal arts instruction, field-based instruction and practice, and a resource center for teaching materials for rural schools. The new curriculum was phased in during the second year, becoming fully operational during the third year.

A part of the new curriculum requires a junior year professional semester consisting of a block of professional education courses and a block of methods courses including a related 2-3 week field experience. During the second year a site for the elementary

education phase of the junior year professional semester field experience was established in Yellowstone County consisting of the small elementary schools located on the periphery of Billings. Western students stay in the Eastern Montana and Rocky Mountain College dormitories. A field manual of tasks for the elementary junior year professional field experience was developed by college instructors and elementary teachers from Yellowstone, Beaverhead, Madison and Silver Bow counties. This fall a field site for the secondary junior year professional field experience was established in Cascade County utilizing Great Falls secondary schools and the small high schools near Great Falls. A field manual was developed by college instructors and secondary teachers from the Great Falls area during the 1989 MEA Convention held in Great Falls. The total program should be completely operational by fall 1990.

e. Project Results: Significant finds to date show that teachers and administrators at field experience sites are much more supportive and effective when they have participated with college instructors in identifying the tasks students will complete at the field sites.

Three task manuals have been developed outlining the activities students will have during participation in their sophomore exploratory field experience and junior professional block field experience.

College methods instructors have found that methods instruction in the various subject areas is much more effective by presenting subject methods prior to attempting methods integration.

The use of host families has successfully been utilized to provide accommodations and meals for students during their one week sophomore field experience. Students arrange for their own transportation to and from the field sites which includes scheduling, meetings and car pooling.

During the three year program development period it became increasingly clear that an important aspect of the program is missing. Research on how education students develop their teaching skills concludes that students learn how to teach through imitation of their teachers. The problem is that presently there is no coordination between the college instruction and that exhibited at the rural field sites.

f. Summary and Conclusions: The three year project funded by FIPSE dramatically changed the teacher education program at Western Montana College. There has been a positive impact on students, college instructors and elementary/secondary teachers and administrators in the field. What started out as a college oriented program became a dynamic program cooperatively developed by students, college instructors and teachers/administrators in the field.

C. Body of Report

1. Project Overview: In 1980 the University System Board of Regents designated Western Montana College as the Montana Rural Education Center. The Rural Education Center serves as a broker between the knowledge producers and the knowledge users, diffusing knowledge of educational services, innovations, changes, new programs, materials, etc., as well as, a feedback link from the user to the producer. During the next six years, following the beginning of the Center, it became evident that in order to improve the quality of education and the breadth of the educational opportunities offered to pupils in rural/small schools there must be a teacher training program to better prepare teachers for rural/small schools.

The Rural Teacher Education Improvement Project's goal was to develop and demonstrate a curriculum that prepares teachers for rural/small schools. The following components of the training model have been institutionalized:

a. The development of a new curriculum to train teachers for rural/small schools.

b. The establishment of laboratory sites throughout the state for field experience in rural/small schools.

c. The establishment of a sophomore exploratory field experience and a junior professional block field experience including the development of three field task manuals.

Presently there are approximately 150 students enrolled in the program each semester. Fifty-five rural/small schools are participating in the program at the field sites.

2. Purpose: Montana and 28 other predominately rural states have growing problems of teacher turnover and are unable to attract and retain highly able teachers. Seventy-five percent of the nation's school districts and

35% of the population now reside in rural areas and there is a need for specialized teacher training to meet unique small school districts needs. The problem to which this project is addressed is threefold: The critical teacher shortages in rural areas across the U.S.; the lack of university support for rural teacher education programs; and, the lack of innovative pre-service models for teacher training which specifically address the needs of rural/small schools.

The program could be easily replicated in a small college where teacher education is the primary mission and there is an established working relationship with rural/small schools.

3. Background and Origins: Montana, geographically the nation's fourth largest state, is 570 miles long (east-west) and 340 miles wide. To put the Montana vastness in perspective, the northwest corner of Montana to the southeast corner is close to 700 miles--farther than Chicago to Washington D.C. Its 147,138 square miles of land can be divided into three main topographical areas: the western one-third is mountainous with fertile valleys, the central is characterized by elevated plains and eroded valleys with long, cold winters and short, hot summers, and the eastern third is a plains area best known for its farming and ranching. These unique features demand planning for education delivery systems. The physical environment of Montana has played a major role in the development of the State's cultural, educational and socio-economic composition. This has influenced population distribution, occupations, and lifestyles of Montana citizens. Seven major Indian reservations are to be found within the state's boundaries. Despite its size, Montana is forty-fourth in population with a distribution density of 5.4 persons per square mile. This fact exerts an enormous influence on the communities and people of the state. No Montana community exceeds

100,000 population, and many are in the three digit category. Forty-seven percent of the state's population reside in rural areas or in communities with populations under 2,500. For this grant proposal, the definition of rural/small schools is one/three teacher elementary schools and small combination high school/elementary schools with high school enrollments under 100 and elementary teachers teaching multigrade.

There are 188 one-four teacher rural elementary schools in Montana with student enrollments ranging from 2-65. Of the 188 one-four teacher schools, 104 are one teacher schools. There are 91 small high schools with student enrollments ranging from 14-114. All of these small/rural high schools have adjoining elementary schools where a majority of the classes are taught multigrade.

Western Montana College of The University of Montana with an enrollment of approximately 1000 students has been involved in the education of teachers since its inception as a Normal College in 1893. Designated in 1980 as the Montana Rural Education Center by University system Board of Regents, the central focus of the institution continues to be providing services to rural students, teachers, school districts and communities. For the past ten years, Western Montana College, in cooperation with the Montana County Superintendents of School Association, has hosted the annual Montana Rural Education conference for teachers and administrators from rural/small schools. The Rural Education Center is funded as a part of Western Montana College and this did not change during the grant period. The funds from the grant provided an extension of the responsibilities of the center in establishing field sites and released time for rural teachers to develop field task manuals.

4. Project Description: The following three models developed through the

program have been institutionalized: 1) the new curriculum to train teachers for rural/small schools; 2) the establishment of laboratory sites throughout the state for field experiences in rural/small schools; and, 3) the establishment of a sophomore exploratory field experience and a junior professional block field experience.

In the first year of the program ten sites were established for the sophomore exploratory field experience and host families identified. A site is a county and comprises the rural/small schools in that county. The counties were chosen that geographically represent most areas of the state and extend from Dawson in the east to Lake/Flathead in the west. A field manual of tasks is completed by students during the one week sophomore exploratory field experience. The manual was developed by elementary and secondary teachers and college instructors. Also, during the first year the new teacher education curriculum was developed and includes expanded liberal arts instruction, field-based instructions and practice, and a resource center for teaching materials for rural schools. The new curriculum was phased in during the second year, becoming fully operational during the third year.

A part of the new curriculum requires a junior year professional semester consisting of a block of professional education courses and a block of methods courses including a related 2-3 week field experience. During the second year a site for the elementary education phase of the junior year professional semester field experience was established in Yellowstone County consisting of small elementary schools located on the periphery of Billings. Western students stay in the Eastern Montana College dormitories. A field manual of tasks for the elementary junior year professional field experience was developed by college instructors and elementary teachers from

Yellowstone, Beaverhead, Madison and Silver Bow counties. This fall a field site for the secondary junior year professional field experience was established in Cascade County utilizing Great Falls secondary schools and the small high schools near Great Falls. A field manual was developed by college instructors and secondary teachers from the Great Falls area during the 1989 MEA Convention held in Great Falls. The total program should be completely operational by fall 1990.

The grant funded two full time staff members, a director and a field coordinator. The FIPSE funds have decreased each year and the college has shared more of the expenses.

5. Project Results: Significant findings to date show that teachers and administrators at field experience sites are much more supportive and effective when they have participated with college instructors in identifying the tasks students will complete at the field sites.

Three tasks manuals have been developed outlining the activities students will have during participation in their sophomore exploratory field experience and junior professional block field experience.

College methods instructors have found that methods instruction in the various subject areas is much more effective by presenting subject methods prior to attempting methods integration.

The use of host families has successfully been utilized to provide accommodations and meals for students during their one week sophomore field experience. Students arrange for their own transportation to and form the field sites which includes scheduling, meetings and car pooling.

During the three year program development period it became increasingly clear that an important aspect of the program is missing. Research on how education students develop their teaching skills concludes that students

learn how to teach through imitation of their teachers. The problem is that presently there is no coordination between the college instruction nd that exhibited at the rural field sites.

A cooperating research team representing Western Montana College and the University of Montana is presently preparing a research model focusing on the effectiveness of Western's rural teacher education program. The goal of the proposed research is to study teachers--from their admission to the Teacher Education Program at Western through the program itself and continuing into about ten years of teaching. The follow-up of the new teachers will be reported nationally and include teacher performance, retention, and job satisfaction in rural/small schools.

Dissemination for the project activities has been a four-way communication thrust utilizing the following: 1) public news media, 2) The Country Connection, a quarterly report/newsletter, 3) professional journals, and 4) presentations at national conferences. By the very nature of the project's budget, FIPSE funds have decreased each year and the college has shared more of the expenses. The success of the project has produced a desire by the college to continue it even after the FIPSE grant has ended.

6. Summary & Conclusions: The three year project funded by FIPSE dramatically changed the teacher education program at Western Montana college. There has been a positive impact on students, college instructors and elementary/secondary teachers and administrators in the field. What started out as a college oriented program became a dynamic program cooperatively developed by students, college instructors, and teachers/administrators in the field.